



CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

Historic Preservation Newsletter

January 2007



Showers Brothers' History

On August 16th, 1884, the Bloomington Telephone headlines screamed:

\$80,000 Go To Smoke,

Showers Bedstead Factory Burned.

A Spark Starts the Fiend of Destruction,

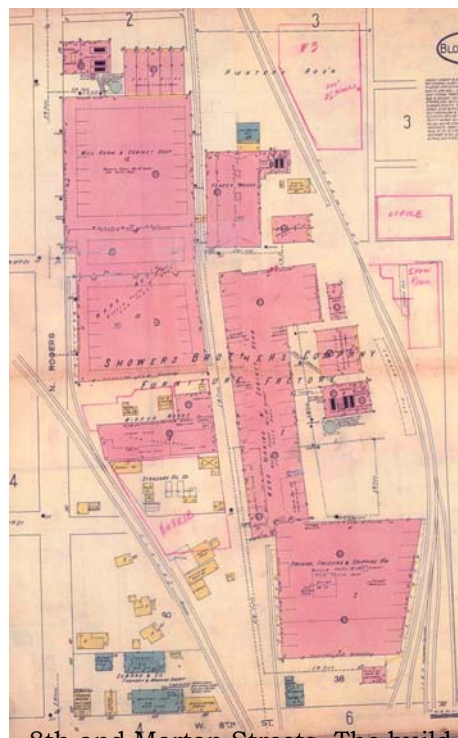
And in less than an hour it sweeps away the pride of the city.

The building in the photograph below occupied the northwest side of 9th and Grant. Built in the early 1860's, its brick construction was probably

considered fire proof as modern technology of the day could make it. In 1860 the business produced 200 bedsteads, 75 tables and 210 bureaus. The Showers fire threw 100 men out of work and was preceded by another devastating fire in Seminary Square, the original site of Indiana University. That fire destroyed Science Hall and catalyzed the move to Dunn's Woods, the site of the current campus.

Bloomington's water shortages were critical to the effort to contain fires like these. A run of typhoid cases beginning in 1885 almost caused the state legislature to reconsider the location of its major University. It doubted the safety of Bloomington's water supply.

With the help of City government and private donations (some from its employees), Showers rebuilt on

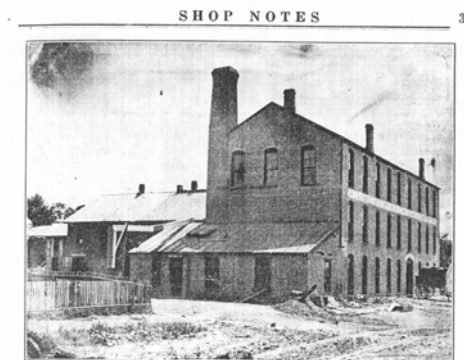


8th and Morton Streets. The building that you see today dates from 1910, replacing one that was built just six months after the fire. The design of Plant #1 is attributed to an engineer named Charles Ballew, who oddly used a timber frame and truss system which would have been considered passé in larger communities where reinforced concrete had become the dominant industrial form.

Today the old factory houses City Hall, Indiana University Research Park and prime commercial space owned and leased by CFC, Inc. It is the keynote in a development dialogue that has revitalized and adapted many industrial buildings on the West side including the Bloomington Garage and the Johnson Brothers Creamery. City Hall is now as much identified with Bloomington as the fish atop the Court-house.

(Above) Circa 1913 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of the Showers Complex. The hand drawn lines show the future locations of the Nurre Mirror Company, the Showers Administration Building and the Furniture Showroom.

The earlier Showers Factory was located near Taylor's Chapel AME Church, in a neighborhood that housed many of Bloomington's black residents. Many chose to purchase homes on the West Side when Showers moved. The east side neighborhood later became the home of black fraternities and sororities and private boarding houses.



Eryn Brennan Speaks January 21st

Eryn Brennan attended Bloomington North High School and University of California, Santa Cruz. She has recently finished her Master's degree in architectural history at University of Virginia. Her thesis, entitled "From Tree to Trade: The Showers Brothers' Factory," analyzes the his-

tory and architecture of Plant # 1. This building, now so familiar to us, houses Bloomington's City Hall, IU Research Park, and CFC's Showers Plaza. The free talk will be held at the **Monroe County Public Library at 2:00 PM. Sunday, the 21st.**

Special points of interest:

- ♦ Showers Brothers Furniture Factory history
- ♦ Local Designation
- ♦ Buy an Interim Report

Local Designation

If you received this newsletter, then you live in a locally designated historic property which means that, either under your ownership or a previous owner, an ordinance was considered and passed by Common Council. That ordinance insures the continuing preservation of your property. Under the process of design review dictated by Council action, all proposed exterior alterations are submitted to the local Historic Preservation Commission to be reviewed against adopted standards.

Our historic commission membership is composed of neighborhood advocates, preservation professionals, appraisers and architects who have an interest in historic buildings. They bring their individual expertise to the table.

The intent of local historic designation is to protect the property from inappropriate changes that harm its historic character. Even when an owner sells a designated property, it maintains its historic status. A designated property cannot be demolished without either the approval of the Historic Preservation Commission or by the owner proving that it cannot earn a reasonable return on its value.

But there are benefits to ownership as well. Locally designated historic properties:

- catalyze neighborhood associations
- increase property values
- foster home ownership

Certificates of Appropriateness

KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE REVIEW PROCESS:

HOW DO I BEGIN?

Application forms can be picked up at the office of Housing and Neighborhood Development in City Hall or downloaded from the city website:

www.bloomington.in.gov/hand/btoncmsn.php. No fee is charged. A few photographs, plans, a map, and a description of the work are all you need. The review will take place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission.

WHERE DO I GO?

Historic Commission meetings are scheduled on the second Thursday of every month and are held in the McCloskey Room of City Hall. You or your representative should plan to appear to answer questions.

WHAT DO I RECEIVE?

A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) is much like a building permit. It should be displayed in your window while work is in progress. If your work also requires a building permit from the Monroe County Building Department, the COA should be attached to the building permit application.



The Vencel property received a \$10,000 façade grant from the BUEA. Here it is after the completion of work to restore a side porch

- Preserve Bloomington for everyone
The benefits of historic preservation are both public and private. We have seen property values in Prospect Hill rise steadily since 1991. In McDoel, the stability of the Conservation District has brought new interest in homeownership, many new residents, and reinvestment. Property values, which had lagged sadly behind the rest of the community, are appreciating well and the McDoel Gardens neighborhood has become a desirable option for young families.

"The process of local designation was a painless process for us at Vencel. Our limestone office, once a residence on North College, needed some minor exterior improvements and by local designating the property we were able to apply a grant which helped. The process of local designation provided us with some insight to the history of our property. Our intent has always been to maintain the historic characteristics of the 1115 N. College home. This style of limestone construction is not common in the area and through the designation process we have assured that the property will carry forward."

-Travis Vencel, Vencel Services



1115 North College added to the local register December 2005

Recent Designations

Since late 2004, the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission has listed six historic properties. Most unusual among these were a couple of hitching posts. These limestone columns have somehow survived 150 years of development, automobile traffic, snow removal equipment, skateboards and all the other hazards of modern life. The hitching pictured post below stands along Restaurant Row, largely unnoticed, in the tree plot.



Also endangered were the brick streets in University Courts, a residential neighborhood north of Dunn Meadow characterized by revival style houses and a large inventory of masonry walls. When this district was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, its thematic walls and streets were noted. Today it contains the only surviving brick streets

Hitching Post added October 2004

Brick Streets in University Courts added April 2005



In 2004 Bloomington Restorations, Inc. took possession of the Hinkle Garton Farmstead, a longtime fixture on East 10th Street that had also escaped the pressures of redevelopment. As a part of its preservation plan, BRI locally designated the site to ensure its continued preservation. BRI moved its offices and opened the first floor which is being redeveloped as a museum and community gathering place. Several successful music events indicate that the farmstead will provide a new and interesting venue for community use.

in Bloomington. Even though the streets are badly patched with concrete and asphalt, to walk down Fess Avenue between 7th and 10th Streets, is to really experience the feeling of another era. Few communities have committed themselves to the preservation of brick streets. Today the City's Public Works Department annually reserves funds for the repair of these brick streets, and this fine old neighborhood, which once housed many university professors and prominent citizens, will retain its wonderful atmosphere of history.

"We are very pleased that the brick streets in University Courts have been locally historically designated. Additionally, we are encouraged that the City of Bloomington is dedicating a sum of money each year for helping to maintain and repair the brick streets."

-Jeannine Butler, University Courts resident and Commission Member

Look for our new Web Site now! Bloomington's Historic Walking Tours available online!
bloomington.in.gov/hand/walking_tours



Hinkle Garton Farmstead added February 2005

"Local designation was a condition of the City Planning approval that allowed BRI to create a museum at the farmhouse and locate its offices in the upstairs. "It only makes sense for the community to get local designation when a property owner seeks a variance that involves reuse of an historic property. Designation ensures that the historic building will be preserved."

-Steve Wyatt, Executive Director BRI



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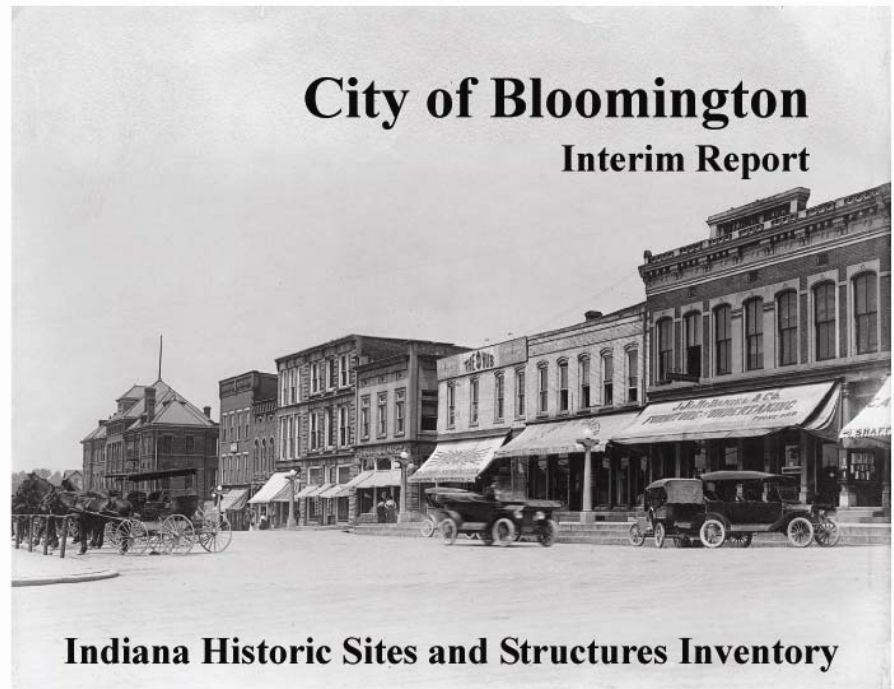
812-349-3401

Housing and Neighborhood
Development

Where Can I Purchase Mine?

The Interim Report is available to purchase at the offices of HAND in City Hall at 401 North Morton. The cost, at that location, is \$15.00. It is also for sale at the Monroe County Historical Society Museum and Howard's Bookstore. Reference copies are available to read at the Indiana Room of the Monroe County Library and the Genealogy Room of the Monroe County Historical Museum.

Publication of the Interim Report was funded by a Historic Preservation Fund Architecture and Survey Grant from the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.



Find Your Place in History